Report And Recommendations of the Statewide LD Policy Planning Group
To the Office of Adult Education Advisory Council
December 5, 2006

A. Background

In the winter of 2004-2005 members of the Governor's Adult Literacy Task Force Assessment Work Group, the state Family Independence Program (FIP) Educational Subcommittee, and Rhode Island Special Education Advisory Committee began discussions around combining forces to develop an adult LD Policy Plan for the state in response to a request from Cheryl Keenan, Director of US DOE Department of Adult and Vocational Education (DAEL). A broad invitation was sent out to the adult education community as well as other state agencies and the first meeting was held in April 2005. The group drafted three inter-related goals:

- ❖ Draft statewide policy to provide appropriate educational, employment, and support services for adults and out of school youth with diagnosed and suspected learning disabilities.
- ❖ Advocate for the adoption of these policies.
- ❖ Research assets, needs, and gaps in educational and workforce training services to adults and out of school youth with diagnosed or suspected learning disabilities.

A brief summary of the group's process, accomplishments to-date, and recommendations follows.

B. Process

Since April 2004, a group of approximately fifteen committed professionals has been meeting monthly to address the goals set out above. The diverse group represents four state agencies (DHS, DOC, ORS, RIDE), administrators and teachers from three community-based organizations that provide services for LD students, (Genesis Center, ProjectLEARN, Dorcas Place), and CCRI, and includes a private consultant, a member of the Rhode Island Special Education Advisory Committee, and two adult education teachers who are themselves learning disabled. Recently, staff members from Goodwill Industries and Ser Jobs for Progress have also attended the work group meetings. (Please see attachments for a list of group members.)

Through discussion of various issues around services for low-skilled adults with diagnosed or suspected learning disabilities, the group developed a matrix of areas for policy development and accompanying questions for further research. (See attachments.) It was decided early on that the recommended policies should address all service providers whose clients include low-skilled adults with diagnosed or suspected learning disabilities. This would include: adult and workforce education services across the education continuum from beginning literacy through entrance to college; Department of Human Services, especially programs for TANF recipients; employment services provided by Department of Labor and Training, such as through one-stops or training vendors; and disability services through the Office of Rehabilitative Services.

Smaller sub-groups explored each area of the matrix and brought recommendations and further questions back to the large group for discussion. Through this iterative process the group developed the recommended Pathway for Native Speakers of English, a tiered professional development approach, and an outline of best instructional practices. (See Attachments for further details of these three components.)

Additionally, because there did not seem to be current, reliable data of services provided to adult learners with diagnosis or suspected learning disabilities, the group designed and implemented a self-report survey to collect information on what services already existed in the state. Information from that survey is summarized below.

C. Progress to date

1. Program Survey

A self-report survey was designed by the group and sent via email, with cover letter from the state Director of the Office of Adult Education (OAE), to all agencies funded through the OAE, vendors who provide services for TANF recipients, and vendors who provide services for the DOC re-entry program. Twenty-eight agencies responded to the survey. The results are summarized in the table below. Survey questions around training, instructional practices, and professional development included details of specific types of each, but which are not included in the summary. The raw data from the survey is also available upon request.

ADULT LD SERVICES SURVEY – SUMMARY OF RESULTS
Spring 2006

Survey Item	Number of Agencies (N=28)		% YES
	YES	NO	
Agency intentionally asks <u>questions at student intake</u> that might indicate learning disabilities.	16	12	57%
Agency has an LD <u>screening protocol</u>.	6	22	21%
Agency uses a specific LD <u>screening tool</u>.	4	24	14%
Agency has a specific <u>referral process</u> for **instructional** services for students with LD.	12	16	43%
Agency has a specific <u>referral process</u> for **diagnostic** services for students with LD.	15	13	54%
Agency has process for obtaining information about a student's <u>IEP</u> from public school attended.	10	18	36%
Agency uses specific LD <u>instructional program</u> (e.g. Orton-Gillingham, Wilson Reading System, Scottish Rite, Lexia, etc).	16	12	57%
Agency has instructors/tutors on <u>staff trained and/or certified</u> in specific LD instructional program.	15	13	54%
Agency has specific <u>assistive technologies</u> for LD students.	7	21	25%
Agency would benefit from <u>professional development</u> around specific LD topics.	25		89%

Though over half of the agencies responding reported that they have some staff trained in specific instructional strategies and do use instructional programs specifically designed for LD learners, very few programs employed a variety of techniques to address learner needs. In fact, 7 out of 12 programs (58%) that reported that they did use specific instructional programs used only one such program (e.g. Orton-Gillingham or Wilson). A much smaller number use a screening tool and protocol to assess the strengths and weaknesses of students with potential LD issues. This and other anomalies in the data led the group to construct an interview protocol to collect more detailed information from those programs reporting some LD services. Conducting these interviews is part of the group's next steps.

2. **Recommended Pathway for Native Speakers of English**

Using knowledge gathered from research and field experience, the work group developed a draft pathway for assessment, placement and support services for all adult education students. It is a branched system dependent on the results of assessment and evaluation at each step along the path. Because there are so few instruments in languages other than English, and because few agencies have bi-lingual assessment staff, the recommended pathway is for English speakers only. The group continues to research other options for ESOL students and will include recommendations for ESOL students as part of next steps. (Please see Attachments for a diagram illustrating the draft Pathway for Native Speakers of English.)

3. **Recommended Pathway for Limited English Spanish Speakers**
[A draft is in development]

4. **Professional Development Tiered Approach**

Obviously the pathway discussed above is only workable if there is trained staff to recognize manifestations of learning disabilities, to administer and interpret screening tools and assessments, and to provide appropriate instruction and transitional services to all students. This comprehensive process requires systematic professional development for all staff providing direct service to low-skilled adults and additional resources from the state.

The group recommends a tiered structure of staff development for various positions throughout the adult and workforce education system. It is also recommended that salaries reflect increasing knowledge and experience as practitioners move up the experience levels. Though further discussion is needed, there is a suggestion that the RIDE, OAE be charged with certifying Master Teachers and LD Specialists based on performance criteria. It is hoped that the newly formed Adult Education Professional Development Center will incorporate these recommendations into their programming and enlist work group members as expert trainers.

A brief outline of the recommended professional development system follows.

TIERED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT for ADULT LD SERVICE PROVIDERS

	Who	**What (examples)**
Level 1 – Awareness	♦ New teacher orientation ♦ All ABE/ASE/ESOL teachers ♦ All frontline ABE, DLT & DHS service providers (e.g. intake staff, case managers/ social workers, counselors, career counselors/ employment specialists) ♦ All program directors in agencies providing services to low-skilled adults	• Understanding LD (definitions, characteristics, and impacts including social/ behavioral) • Screening protocols • Legal issues • Program design issues • Transition issues • Program and state policies • Local & national resources
Level 2 – Awareness + Basic Instructional Strategies	♦ All beginning literacy & beginning ABE teachers/ tutors (but open to all practitioners)	• Small, sequential, multi-sensory increments • Structured activities • Practice, practice, practice • Individual student's strengths, ways of learning • Concrete to abstract • Constant review & practice
Level 3 – Highly Qualified Teachers	♦ Program-based Master Teachers (recommend one in each program offering ABE level classes and serving 100 students or more)	• (Adapted from: Recommendations by the International Dyslexia Association to the US DOE re: Highly Qualified Teachers)
Level 4 – LD Specialists [*Note: There are currently at least 6 individuals within the RI Adult Education system that meet these criteria.*]	♦ Regional LD Specialists (recommend one in each service region or network, paid part-time by state) ♦ Bi-lingual LD Specialist (recommend at least one Spanish/English bi-lingual specialist paid part-time by state)	• Certifications in various multi-sensory reading and math instruction, one of which must be OG-based with practicum. • Knowledge and experience in a wide range of instructional strategies for adults with LD • Knowledge and experience in a wide range of assessment tools • Experience working with individuals with LD • Experience in adult education classroom

		• BA/BS at minimum

D. Next steps

The state-wide LD Policy Planning work group has set out its agenda for FY 07. These tasks are outlined below:

- Finish refining Best Practices document.

- Include recommendations for Transition services (e.g., employment, job training, higher education) in the Pathway diagrams.

- Develop a Highly Qualified ABE Math Teacher Profile.

- Include recommendations for documentation and record keeping.

- Draft recommendations for non-English speakers, as much as feasible.

- Recruit a work group to tackle the issue of professional diagnostic testing for low-income adults.

- Continue discussions with K-12 with regard to youth transferring into the adult education system, requesting records and the cost of these transfers.

- Continue discussions with DLT (and OAE Workforce Integration work group) to encourage mapping training programs and employment services for low-skilled adults including English language learners.

- Survey training programs and employment services around the LD services they provide.

- Update the Rhode Island adult educational services directory, "Learning Disabilities Project Resource Guide", last revised in 2001 (and eventually include transition services).

- Initiate discussions with the OAE Assessment work group around assessments for low level learners.

- Initiate discussions with the OAE Teacher Leadership work group and new PD Center around tiered professional development/competencies in LD and processes for "credentialing" LD specialists and improving compensation.

- Synthesis all information and draft final policy recommendations for RIDE.

List of Attachments:

1. Recommended Pathway for Native Speakers of English including:
    -List of red flag questions for intake
    -Data used for level cut off of 5.9
    -Description of 'failure to respond to instruction'
2. Blank Provider Survey
3. Adapted version of Highly Qualified Teachers from the International Dyslexia Association
4. Work group members